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131554Z Sep 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 003881

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DEPT FOR EUR/ERA, EUR/RUS, EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2009

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER RS EUN USEU BRUSSELS

SUBJECT: EUR DAS TEFFT REVIEWS RUSSIA, UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND BELARUS WITH EU OFFICIALS

Classified By: USEU POLOFF LEE LITZENBERGER; REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶11. (C) Summary. In meetings with EU officials on September 10, EUR DAS Tefft discussed recent events in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. EU officials viewed the Beslan attack as a failure of Putin's Chechnya policy, expected him to respond by doing more of the same, and predicted cooler EU-Russian relations as Putin moves away from the shared values embodied in the OSCE. Free and fair presidential elections in Ukraine would "change everything" in EU relations with Kiev. The EU agreed to consider the US draft text on Moldova's security pact initiative, both as a means of blocking a possible "Kozak II" plan from Russia and to spur a pentagonal meeting. Lukashenko's announced referendum was a step backward for Belarus, and EU officials suggested DAS Tefft explore with his Dutch counterpart the timing and purpose of a possible joint demarche to Minsk in October. EU officials in the Council and Commission expressed firm commitment to coordinating policy and actions in the region with the US. End Summary.

¶12. (C) On September 10, EUR DAS John Tefft met with Council Secretariat and Commission officials to discuss recent events

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in and US-EU coordination on Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. At the Council Secretariat, DAS Tefft met with Robert Cooper, Solana's Foreign Policy Advisor; Stefan Lehne, Cooper's Unit Chief for Balkan and CIS issues; Jukka Leskala, Section head for Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus; and Carl Hallergard, Ukraine desk. DAS Tefft met separately with Kees van Rij, CIS Task Force head for Solana's Policy planning unit, and with Hugues Mingarelli, Commission director for CIS programs.

Cooper on Russia

¶13. (C) DAS Tefft provided a readout of his meetings the day before in Moscow. Cooper said the EU had sensed Russia taking a tougher line on foreign policy issues for some time, and is concerned that the Beslan attack will reinforce Putin's authoritarian tendencies. Cooper observed that every 18 months or so, Russia has a major disaster (Cooper referred to the submarine incident), following which Russia goes through a period of turmoil, but in the end nothing changes. Cooper said the Beslan incident illustrates the complete failure of Putin's Chechnya policy. What's worrisome, he added, is that since what he's done has failed, Putin will do more of it. Discussing how to persuade Putin that Beslan demonstrates the need for Russia to resolve other frozen conflicts (e.g. South Ossetia), Cooper said perhaps the EU should offer to work with Russia to enhance border security. The turmoil inside Russia would continue for some time, he said, but it might be worthwhile to get some ideas in there now. Maybe Russia could be persuaded of the benefits of dealing "with the easy bits around the edges" of Chechnya.

¶14. (C) Lehne observed that Putin, in his speech after Beslan, seemed to blame the incident on the breakup of the Soviet Union. Hartzell observed that Russia feels weak after Beslan, and won't want to make any deals on frozen conflicts now. Russia prefers to negotiate from a position of strength. Cooper agreed that Beslan would make it harder to engage Russia productively on Transnistria, noting that Putin may "win" Transnistria but, in the process, lose Moldova. Hartzell commented that Russia always seems to support yesterday's people; Cooper added that one never loses credit in the Russian MFA for failing to reach a political settlement.

CIS Summit will criticize OSCE

¶15. Van Rij informed Tefft that the CIS summit in Astana on September 16 will adopt a "very bad" statement critical of the OSCE. The CIS states want the OSCE to focus on terrorism and security issues, rather than on democracy or human rights. Van Rij, who has seen the draft text, believe an increasingly nationalistic Russia, less interested in common values with Europe, is behind the document. He said Russia wants to use the CIS summit to bring Ukraine, Moldova and

Georgia "back into the fold" and predicted a difficult period ahead in EU-Russian relations, should Russia continue to distance itself from basic OSCE values.

Ukraine: Elections and Transnistria

16. (C) Following DAS Tefft's assessment of the upcoming presidential elections in Ukraine, Cooper noted that free and fair elections "would change everything" for the EU in terms of its engagement with Kiev. Cooper said he tells the Poles, who urge closer EU ties to Ukraine, "if the EU takes Turkey, it can't say no to Ukraine." Van Rij said he was impressed with new First Deputy FM Motsyk, who recently took a line different from Kuchma -- even in talks with Smirnov -- and said that Ukraine agreed with the EU on some things regarding the recent school closings in Transnistria. Van Rij relayed recent rumors, which he found eminently plausible -- that Ukrainian elites including Medvedchuk, Kuchma relatives and even Chernomyrdin had recently acquired equity holdings in Transnistrian steel. Thus, van Rij saw little hope that Ukraine would take a tough stand on Smirnov in Transnistria.

17. (C) At the Commission, Mingarelli said the EU's Neighborhood Policy goal for Ukraine is to integrate the country into the EU's internal market. The EU will open up its markets following Ukraine's WTO accession, help Ukraine meet EU commercial standards, and wants to integrate Ukraine into Europe's transportation network. The EU also plans to ease the movement of people by introducing a short-term visa for Ukraine, working to enhance border controls, and funding exchanges in the areas of research, education, energy and transport. EU assistance in these areas will be conditioned on democratic reform, with initial focus on the Presidential elections, where EU observers will work under an OSCE mandate. Mingarelli said Kuchma complained at last July's EU-Ukraine summit that the EU criticized Kiev for its elections, but said nothing about Russia's presidential elections.

Moldova/Transnistria

18. (C) DAS Tefft shared with Cooper and van Rij the US draft text of a Stability Pact statement on Moldova. Cooper saw merit in the exercise as a way to show Voronin the US and EU took his initiative seriously, and to give the Moldovans an alternative to a possible Russian "Kozak II" plan. Cooper also thought the EU could use the text as an opportunity to try and organize a pentagonal meeting as well, once the school crisis is resolved. Van Rij agreed that the text could be useful to block a Kozak II initiative from Moscow. He expressed relief that Voronin would not be traveling to Astana for the CIS summit; the EU was concerned Moscow would use the event to press Voronin to accept a Kozak II plan. Van Rij said the EU was working on a medium-term strategy paper on Moldova that analyzes the potential roles of Moldova's neighbors in resolving Transnistria.

19. (C) Cooper said Smirnov sees an opportunity -- due to the changed mood in Moscow -- to "pinch out a salient" and take steps toward Transnistrian independence. This explained Smirnov's recent closing of Moldovan language schools and his actions with the railways. The Russians are trying to smooth things over, Cooper said, but in ways that help Smirnov consolidate his gains. Cooper said the EU, in addition to the visa ban on education officials in Transnistria, was also looking at freezing bank accounts.

Belarus

110. (C) Cooper said Lukashenko's referendum announcement introduced a new element in the equation, and the US and EU should think carefully about timing and purpose of a joint demarche to Minsk. Lehne commented that Lukashenko would not have announced the referendum without being confident he would win. Both predicted Putin would not block Lukashenko; Cooper said the Russians refuse to put Belarus on the agenda with the EU -- at one point remarking, "soon Belarus will be an internal issue."

111. (C) Van Rij said the EU would soon be ready to announce a travel ban on three former Belarusian ministers (Cooper noted Hungary had raised a point of concern that might delay announcement). He said the EU was looking at further steps, too, should the situation warrant them, and had included in its recent statement on the referendum that it was considering "possible further steps." DAS Tefft raised a question about the timing of announcing an expanded visa ban.

He suggested that we have limited leverage with Belarus and that perhaps we should consider holding off on the visa ban for use at the most optimum moment.

112. (C) Mingarelli argued that Europe should engage Belarus more actively and at higher levels than at present. In response to DAS Tefft's arguments against this line of reasoning, Mingarelli acknowledged that although he personally wants to step up the dialogue, this is not the

prevailing view in Brussels.

¶13. (U) This cable was cleared by DAS Tefft.

SCHNABEL